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Kenya smallholder dairy project paves the way to expand milk production and marketing in East Africa

The [Smallholder Dairy Project](#), carried out in Kenya by ILRI and the Kenyan Agricultural Research Institute in collaboration with the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries Development, achieved technical improvements and policy changes that resulted in benefits totalling more than USD 33 million a year.

Milk – it's different in developing countries

In the West most milk is produced on large farms, pasteurized and packaged by big businesses, and purchased by consumers in supermarkets – the days of the early-morning clink of glass bottles during doorstep deliveries, common a few decades ago, are fast disappearing.

In developing countries, the story is different. Although milk is available in supermarkets, and supermarkets are rapidly gaining market share, most people still purchase raw (unprocessed) milk, produced locally by small-scale dairy farmers and bought at the farm-gate or from small-scale mobile informal traders.

Milk in Kenya

In the late 1990s 1.8 million dairy farmers, mostly keeping just one or two cows each, and at least 35,000 small-scale milk traders, supplied most milk produced and sold in Kenya. Small-scale dairy farms provided 365,000 waged jobs, while processing and trading of milk supported a further 40,000 jobs.

Consumers preferred the taste of raw milk to processed and packaged products, while the lower price of informally marketed milk made it more affordable to the majority of Kenyans. Also, people could buy as much or as little as they wanted; even the very poor could sometimes have a little milk.

Kenyans mainly consume milk in tea, prepared by boiling tea leaves in milk and adding sugar to make a sweet, nutritious and very popular drink. So, although the milk is raw, by the time it is consumed it has been boiled, which effectively deals with many potential health threats.

However, the Kenya Dairy Board regarded raw milk as an unregulated and illegal threat to public health.

Changing attitudes and practices

The partners behind the project worked with small-scale producers and traders, helping them with training on farm management and more hygienic milk handling practices to improve milk quality, as well as business and entrepreneurial skills. Policymakers were kept informed of findings, including explaining the importance of the informal market for producers, traders and consumers.

Provision of convincing evidence in formats which could be readily understood by the policymakers led, in 2004, to policy changes which enabled the informal milk traders to become licensed.

Previously, when Dairy Board inspectors appeared on the street, illegal traders would often pour their milk away to destroy the evidence. In the new, more supportive and enabling climate, the number of milk traders increased significantly and wastage was reduced.

More traders meant more opportunities for small-scale milk producers to sell their milk and more competition between traders led to an increase in the price paid to the farmers. Milk supply to consumers increased and, with greater competition, retail prices dropped. Better relations between traders and inspectors resulted in greater compliance with milk quality regulations, so consumers were also able to buy with increased confidence in the quality and safety of the milk.

The benefits were high

Benefits generated for small-scale producers, traders and consumers totalled over USD 33 million a year, from more milk, higher quality milk and more jobs in milk production and marketing. The net result was a shift from an unregulated informal system to a more formal trading environment.

Dairy became a sector that is helping to [educate Kenya's children](#). The project won four prestigious international awards during its eight-year lifespan.

Why did the project succeed?

Analysis of the factors that contributed to the success of the project revealed four key approaches that are likely to be useful to others engaged in policy change processes.

Use of evidence

Wide-ranging, highly robust, and relevant evidence was important in influencing policy change. Information was provided to regulatory and government entities throughout

the project, enabling trust and understanding to be steadily built. Armed with credible facts, farmers were empowered to speak at a Dairy Policy Forum held at the close of the project. By holding this forum, the project gained additional support from key officials and politicians.

Collaboration

ILRI and the Kenyan Agricultural Research Institute collaborated on this project with the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries Development. The inputs of both highly reputable research institutions and the involvement of the Ministry added weight to the credibility of the evidence.

Citizen voice and representation

Innovative links between the project and advocacy-focused civil society organizations (CSOs) also played a key role. Although research organizations and CSOs differ in mandates and operational modes, developing and maintaining a shared vision achieved effective collaboration between them. These links were crucial, provided access to grassroots organizations and helped open new channels for influencing key individuals and stakeholders.

Taking advantage of political context

By regularly providing research-based information and evidence to other organizations and stakeholders, the project took advantage of the changing political context in Kenya, including the role of civil society and increased influence of citizens.

What next?

Lessons learned from the project are being applied in Tanzania and Uganda, and further afield in India – the world's largest milk market.

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